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NEGATIVE PUBLIC IMAGE
CHANGING WORK SCHEDULES
EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION
HARDENING OF EMOTIONS
PROBLEMS WITH CHILDREN
OVERPROTECTING THE
SPOUSE AND FAMILY

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**STRESS
MANAGEMENT**

The law enforcement profession is laden with job-related stressors such as shift work, staff shortages, job overload and high visibility in the public's eye. These are just a few stressors that contribute to the pressure and strain on police personnel. Stress may produce adverse effects in an individual. The main types of adverse effects are (1) impaired job performance, (2) psychological problems and (3) physical health problems. This includes difficulties in carrying out duties effectively and efficiently as well as absenteeism and premature retirement.

Law enforcement personnel have an image to uphold: the image of one who "protects and serves" no matter the circumstances or dangers encountered. In this line of work, it is essential for one to become psychologically hardened in many situations. While performing one's duty, there is no time for human emotions such as fear, anger or sadness. As a result, shedding this image off duty becomes difficult and can create a great deal of stress. The effects of stress can impact not only the individual, but the individual's family, the department and the people served by the department.

It is important to realize that a person must assume self-responsibility in one's level of health and sickness. To a certain degree each person is responsible for the quality of life one lives. There are no shortcuts to stress management. It takes a personal commitment, total involvement, and an understanding of stress, its symptoms and causes.

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Stress appears in many forms. Listed below are some, but not all, symptoms a person may develop due to stress.

Physical Symptoms:

- stomach ulcers
- high blood pressure
- fatigue
- increased susceptibility to illness (weakening of immune system)
- chest pains
- migraine headaches
- sleep problems
- rapid or shallow breathing

Do not overlook these warning symptoms. Heart attacks and strokes are the number one cause of death for America's criminal justice worker.

Emotional Symptoms:

- poor appetite (either overeating or not eating enough)
- general irritability and chronic anger
- emotional instability, moodiness
- difficulty concentrating (leads to accident proneness)
- cynicism
- depression
- poor memory
- displacement (blaming others)
- depersonalization

If any of the stress symptoms mentioned above are persistent or have become a chronic pattern in your life, seek help. Talk to someone you trust. Do not deny or disregard these symptoms or warning signs.

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STRESS MANAGEMENT

There are steps to reduce the hazardous effects of job demands, unhealthy lifestyle, stress and trauma. Here are some tips to help reduce the stress in your life:

1. Accept the fact you are human

Some things are out of your control and the outcome does not lie in your possession. Accept you do not have all the answers and you may not always be right. Also accept, despite your best efforts and motives, situations may not turn out in the best possible way. Accepting you are human is accepting your feelings and faults; your strengths and weaknesses; and your limitations.

2. Exercise

Physical activity is one of the most effective stress reducers. A twenty minute work-out a couple times a week relieves stress and allows for the release of pent up tension and anxiety.

3. Develop positive anti-stress habits

- Find ways to cut back on your activities and commitments. Learn to say “No”. Self-induced stress may be the result of over-extending yourself.
- Plan ahead whenever possible in order to avoid the last minute rush.
- Be aware of your daily rhythms. Plan activities during the time of day when you have the most energy.
- Evaluate how you spend your time - learn time management. Prioritize the things in your life and let go of the less important tasks which do not necessarily HAVE to be done.
- When possible, do not tackle too many changes/decisions at once.
- Ask for help or assistance.

MANAGEMENT

4. Practice good nutrition

Eat the right kinds of food; cut back on your fats and cholesterol. Your diet should include foods rich in fiber and complex carbohydrates, along with fruits and vegetables. A healthy body leads to a healthy mind, a mind better able to handle stress and prevent the weakening of one's immune system.

5. Get enough sleep and rest

It is essential to get enough rest; sleep is a restorative process for the body as well as the mind. At least six hours of sleep per night is necessary to function at an optimum level. Deprivation of sleep over a long period of time is not healthy.

6. Develop your family and friends as support groups

Talk out your worries. Share your thoughts, feelings, and reactions with those close to you. They may have the same concerns. Keep the lines of communication open.

7. Learn relaxation techniques

Develop a program for yourself in which you block out outside interference. Focus on relaxing your body. This does not mean relax to the point of sleep, rather take ten or fifteen minutes to re-group and focus. If time does not allow for this, take ten deep breaths and face the problem slightly more relaxed than before. Limit the noise in your home. Turn the TV off or the radio down.

8. Limit your intake of caffeine and alcohol

Caffeine is a stimulant and can have the same affect as too much stress. Alcohol is a depressant and can aggravate stress. Avoid a stress seesaw by restricting your use of both caffeine and alcohol. Develop other ways of relaxing.



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DON'T

Think you are "crazy" - stress reactions to abnormal situations are normal.

Withdraw from family, friends and co-workers.

Automatically stay away from work.

Drink alcohol excessively.

Use legal or illegal substances to numb post-trauma consequences.

DO

Learn to take one thing at a time.

Learn to accept things you cannot change or control.

Maintain a good diet and exercise.

Take time for leisure activities.

Remind yourself that stress from certain incidents is normal.

Spend time with family, friends and co-workers.

Talk to others who are good listeners when an incident bothers you.

Assess your attitude towards life and your job.

Get extra help, if necessary.

Stress management requires an understanding of stress symptoms and causes. It also requires a personal commitment. This should be a commitment all law enforcement personnel are willing to make for themselves, their family and the public they serve.

For more information contact:

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